Any truth in St Swithin's weather folklore?

14 July 2011 - The legend has been around for centuries and is still heeded by many today - but is there any truth behind it?

"St Swithin's Day, if it does rain
Full forty days, it will remain
St Swithin's Day, if it be fair
For forty days, t'will rain no more"

So the rhyme goes for St Swithin's Day on 15 July, which must be the most famous piece of weather folklore we have in the UK.

The history says St Swithin was a monk who died in 862 AD. According to his own request, he was buried in the churchyard of the Old Minster (cathedral) at Winchester in a spot where "the sweet rain from heaven might wet his grave".

More than a century later he was canonised and his remains were moved inside the cathedral on 15 July. It was said that his spirit was so outraged that it rained for the next 40 days.

While the story is compelling, it's not entirely backed up by historical records and, similarly, when it comes to the weather folklore it's not backed up by weather statistics.

Numerous studies have been carried out on past weather observations and none of them have proved the legend true. In fact, since the start of records in 1861, there have neither been 40 dry or 40 wet days following the corresponding weather on St Swithin's Day.

So despite the forecast of the potential for some rain in many places across the UK this St Swithin's Day, you should keep up to date with forecasts from the Met Office to really find out what weather may be in store for the next few days and weeks.

And while there have been media reports that we're heading towards the coolest and wettest summer for 20 years, the truth is it is just too early to say how this summer will compare to others. We still have two weeks of July and all of August to go before the end of the summer, and there is still everything to play for.

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